

WORLD WIDE WONDER

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Shortly after the end of World War II, 37 countries from across the globe came together in London to establish what we know today as UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. While their mission has grown in both scope and reach, their initial purpose was clear: to encourage dialogue and respect among world nations and cultures, and in doing so, to prevent the outbreak of war.

The group's shared vision included the protection and preservation of cultural treasures and natural areas of significance. A 1972 convention led to the establishment of the World Heritage List, which now includes more than a thousand natural, cultural and mixed sites across 165 states and nations. We connected with the experts at Harper-recommended global destination specialist **Abercrombie & Kent** for their picks of the world's most impressive UNESCO World Heritage sites.





HA LONG BAY VIETNAM

Near the Chinese border in North Vietnam, in the Gulf of Tonkin, Ha Long Bay is an enchanting seascape of jagged limestone pillars, arches and caves that can only be explored by boat. Though Ha Long contains roughly 1,600 islands spread out over 580 square miles, the bay remains largely uninhabited save for the floating villages, where residents live aboard houseboats and children row to school. Villagers have historically

relied on fishing for their income, which today is supplemented by tourism.

Ha Long serves as a prime example of the benefits of the World Heritage designation. Under the pressures of marine transport, fishing and tourism, the efforts toward regulation and sustainable management under UNESCO's guidance have preserved the integrity of Vinh Ha Long, translated as the place "where the dragon descends to the sea."



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PHOTO COURTESY OF LONGITUDE 131° © DAVID HANCOCK/SKYSKAN





THE VALLEY OF THE TEMPLES

AGRIGENTO, SICILY

Located on the southwestern coast of Sicily, the city of Agrigento was founded by Greek colonists in the 6th century B.C. Due to its location on the Mediterranean, it was a center of agriculture and art and one of the greatest cities of its time. Seven Doric temples dominate a long plateau above the valley, and the region is rich in Greek architecture and artifacts. While the Carthaginians later ruled Agrigento before it fell to Rome, many of the structures on the site were never covered over by its subsequent inhabitants nor converted to new purposes. It thus remains one of the world's most well-preserved examples of Greek architecture and influence.

ULURU-KATA TJUTA NATIONAL PARK

AUSTRALIA

The Anangu Aboriginal people are the ancestral inhabitants of the site known as Uluru National Park, in central Australia. An immense sandstone monolith, Uluru, otherwise known as Ayers Rock, dominates the vast desert landscape. At 2,800 feet high and six miles in circumference, the weathered "Red Heart" is the spiritual home of the Aborigines and is considered a sacred site. Nearby, the 36 domes that make up the Kata Tjuta formations, or "many heads," are spread over a 12-mile area.

Depending upon weather conditions, the effects of sunlight on the formations can alter the color of the sandstone to appear purple, orange, pink or a deep red at sunrise or sunset. "It is worth the trouble to arise early for a sunrise breakfast," says Andrew Harper. "When the ancient landscape is just waking up, it feels especially tranquil and mystical, and the play of light on Ayers Rock is unforgettable."

1. The remains of a Doric temple and a colossal statue in Agrigento 2. Uluru seen from the nearby recommended resort Longitude 131° 3. The Temple of Concordia in Agrigento

HARPER EXPERIENCE

Agrigento and the Valley of the Temples with Verdura Resort

Visitors to the temples of Agrigento may be surprised by their condition. "Despite being around 2,500 years old, these fascinating monuments are extraordinarily well-preserved and stand almost unaffected by time and weather to this day," says Ambra Rollero of **Verdura Resort**. Guests can tour the site through a guided visit to the temples of Concordia, Hercules and Jupiter, among others. The Resort also offers the option of visiting the Valley of the Temples on horseback.

HARPER EXPERIENCE

Kantju Gorge with Longitude 131°

The guided Mala Walk to Kantju Gorge offers insight into the Mala clan, the legendary ancestors of the Anangu. The trek to the sacred gorge, a quiet waterhole at the bottom of Uluru's dramatic rock face, begins as day transforms into night. At its end, guests of adjacent **Longitude 131°** enjoy sundowners and canapés as the gorge walls blaze with the light of the setting sun.

CARCASSONNE

FRANCE

Andrew Harper describes Carcassonne as an “awe-inspiring” example of medieval fortification. The walled city occupies a hilltop on the banks of the river Aude in the Languedoc-Roussillon region in southwestern France. The city’s earliest remaining fortifications date back to the year 485, while the distinctive turrets and towers of the outer ramparts were constructed under King Louis IX and his son Philip III in the 13th century.

After Roussillon became part of France in 1659, the site was gradually abandoned until architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc initiated restoration work in 1853. This work had a significant impact on the preservation of the site and, ultimately, its designation by UNESCO. The impressive Narbonne Gate still serves as the main entry to the city, which today is home to some 47,000 residents.



Battlements and towers within the medieval town of Carcassonne, France

CANADIAN ROCKY MOUNTAIN PARKS

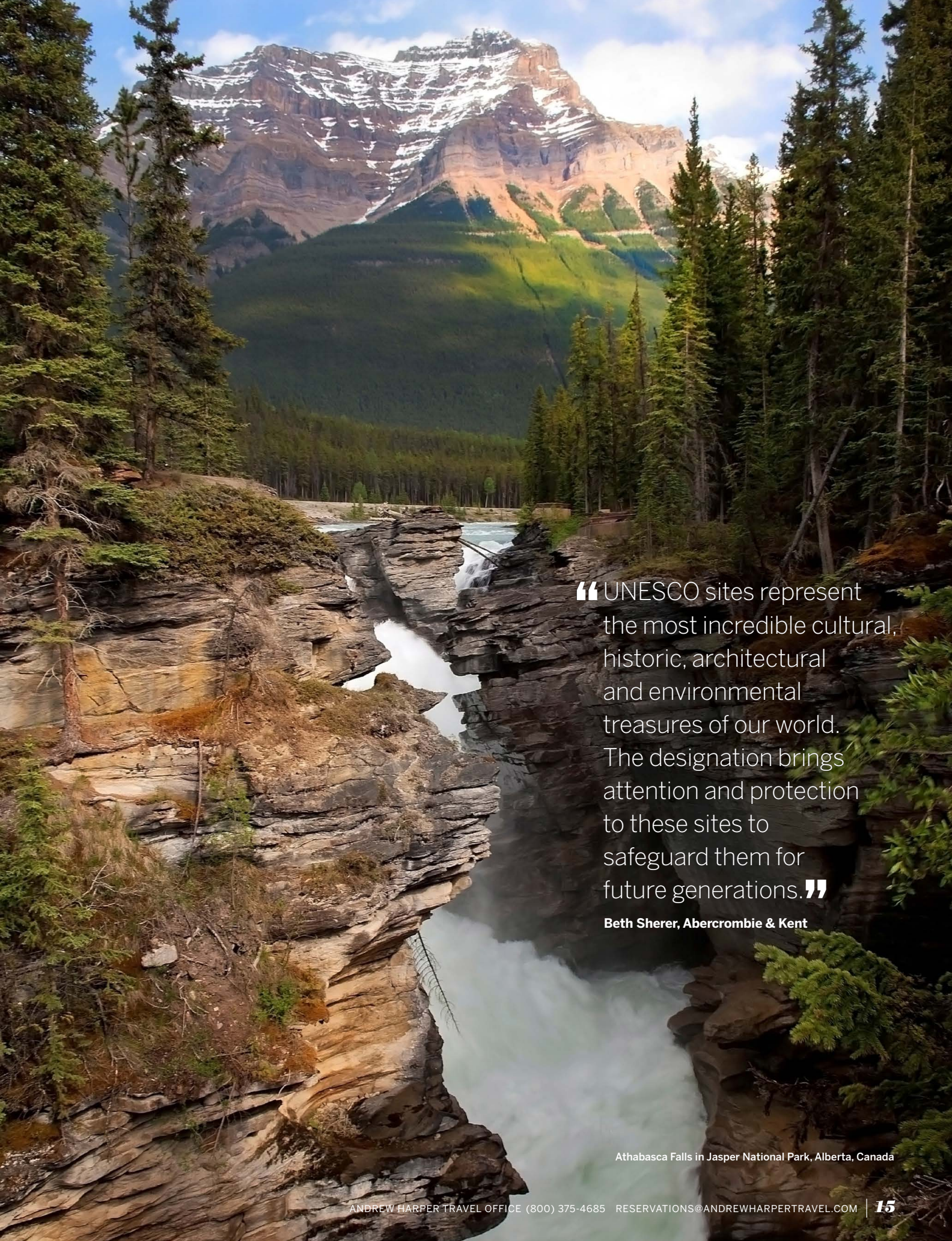
ALBERTA, CANADA

In southwestern Alberta, the Canadian Rocky Mountains are home to four national and three provincial parks. The area is an alpine wonderland of peaks and glaciers, lakes and waterfalls, caves and canyons. It’s an “indescribable combination of stunning natural beauty with an abundance of interesting wildlife,” says A&K’s Liam Dunch.

Banff National Park alone covers more than 2,500 square miles, with numerous peaks above 10,000 feet. The park is home to active glaciers and stunning Lake Louise and Moraine Lake. The area is also renowned for its fossil fields: The Burgess Shale is considered one of the best-preserved and most important fossil formations in the world, providing evidence of the history and early evolution of marine life.



A moose grazes near the Vermillion Lakes area of Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada.



“UNESCO sites represent the most incredible cultural, historic, architectural and environmental treasures of our world. The designation brings attention and protection to these sites to safeguard them for future generations.”

Beth Sherer, Abercrombie & Kent

Athabasca Falls in Jasper National Park, Alberta, Canada

WADI RUM PROTECTED AREA

JORDAN

Located near the border of Saudi Arabia, Wadi Rum in southern Jordan earned its World Heritage designation for both its natural qualities and cultural significance. In a varied desert landscape of cliffs, arches, gorges and caverns, tens of thousands of rock carvings and inscriptions provide evidence of 12,000 years of human occupation and interaction with the natural environment. The dramatic features also frequently substitute for the otherworldly locations in films such as “The Martian” and “Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.”

“The incredible shades of red, orange and brown under blue skies, especially at sunset, give this area an out-of-this-world feel,” says A&K’s Claudia Worth. “You can’t walk away untouched by its awesome raw beauty, or by the incredible hospitality of the Bedouins who live there.”

A Bedouin camel driver approaches the dramatic sandstone mountains of Wadi Rum, Jordan.





BOROBUDUR TEMPLE

JAVA, INDONESIA

The Buddhist temple compound of Borobudur in central Java is, according to one theory, laid out in the form of a lotus, an important and recurring symbol in Buddhist iconography. The terraces of the main temple represent the stages through which a *bodhisattva*, or Buddhist saint, must pass to experience enlightenment. Constructed between 778 and 850, Borobudur was buried under volcanic ash around the year 1000, before it was rediscovered in 1814. It was first restored by a team of Dutch archaeologists in the early 1900s, then again under UNESCO in the 1970s.

Borobudur's stupas, temples, statues and relief carvings are exceptional examples of Indonesian art and architecture of the 8th and 9th centuries, and the site is considered one of the world's greatest Buddhist monuments. It is best seen at dawn, says A&K's Beth Sherer, "when the sun rises above the surrounding volcanoes and rice patties to illuminate the monument."

HARPER EXPERIENCE

Borobudur Temple with Amanjiwo

Experience the magic of Borobudur temple at daybreak on a guided tour as part of your stay at nearby **Amanjiwo**. Guests depart at 4:30 a.m. for the short drive to Borobudur. On-site, they're led by flashlight up the 90 steps of the temple. Around 5:15, the calling of prayer accompanies the sunrise as the light plays on the surrounding volcanoes, creating an unforgettable spiritual experience.

1. Sunrise over the stupas of Borobudur Temple 2. View of the temple from Amanjiwo



The well-preserved ruins of Machu Picchu

MACHU PICCHU PERU

No list of World Heritage sites would be complete without Machu Picchu. On the eastern slopes of the Andes in a tropical mountain forest 50 miles from Cusco, Machu Picchu preserves the cultural and technological sophistication of the Inca Empire. With more than 170 buildings perched on a ridge 1,600 feet above the

Urubamba River valley, UNESCO says it is “among the greatest artistic, architectural and land use achievements anywhere.”

Built and occupied from the mid-15th to mid-16th centuries, current theories suggest Machu Picchu served as a palace complex and royal retreat. This sanctuary city includes hundreds of layers of terraces built for

agricultural use and to stabilize and reinforce the site. The white granite of the city’s temples, fountains, terraces and plazas was quarried from the hillside above the city and is a prime example of the precision stonework for which the Inca were known.



View from an aircraft flying over the Okavango Delta, Botswana

HARPER EXPERIENCE

Elephants in the Okavango with Sanctuary Retreats

Sanctuary Retreats, one of Andrew Harper's recommended safari lodge partners, has an exclusive relationship with the Living with Elephants Foundation in the Okavango Delta. Doug and Sandi Groves, who run the foundation, are the caretakers of two orphaned elephants named Morula and Jabu, who live on Sanctuary's private concession in the Delta.

Each morning, guests are invited to join the elephants on their daily walk. "Guests never forget the day they walk hand-in-trunk with an elephant through the bush," says Lara Vancans of Sanctuary Retreats.

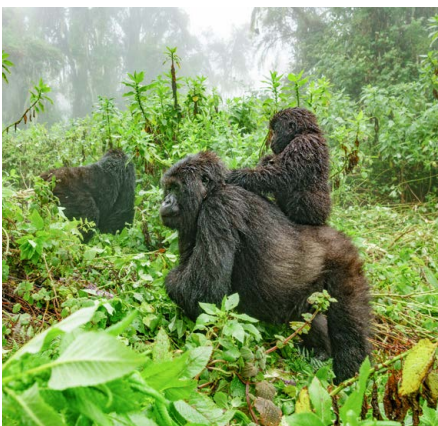
OKAVANGO DELTA BOTSWANA

The Okavango Delta is one of the world's most remarkable natural wonders. Wetlands, forest, savannah and desert are in close proximity here, and the plants and animals of the region have synchronized their biological cycles with the hydrological ones. Each year, the annual flood

tide transforms the dry autumn plains into wetlands and welcomes herds of elephant, African buffalo, lechwe (a species of antelope) and zebra as they complete their migration across the Kalahari Desert.

More than 480 species of birds make their home here, along with 130 species of

mammals, including the endangered cheetah, white and black rhinoceros, wild dog and lion. The preservation of this "Jewel of the Kalahari," including the 1,900-square-mile Moremi Game Reserve, was imperiled for years before its inscription to the World Heritage list in 2014.



Mountain gorillas in Virunga National Park

VIRUNGA NATIONAL PARK

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

While endangered mountain gorillas are the deserving stars of Virunga National Park and adjacent Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, the area's geological diversity is equally impressive. The region contains steppes, savannahs, plains, marshlands, lowland forests and permanent glaciers. The range of habitats contributes to a biodiversity which UNESCO says surpasses that of any other park in Africa.

Elephants, lions, buffalo and antelope make their home within Virunga's 3,050 protected square miles, along with an estimated 2,000 hippopotamuses.

The continent's two most active volcanoes, Nyamuragira and Nyiragongo, are located within the Virunga massif in the southern part of the park. The snowcapped Rwenzori Mountains dominate the north and constitute the only true alpine mountain chain in Africa.



Traditional Cambodian Apsara dancers depict scenes from the Ramayana in Siem Reap, Cambodia
CJMAC/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



A fado musician performs in the Alfama district of Lisbon, Portugal.
©ISTOCK.COM/KILLERBAYER

In 2003, UNESCO adopted a convention to safeguard cultural heritage beyond physical sites in order to raise awareness around oral traditions, rituals and festive events. The subsequent Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists include everything from beer culture in Belgium to coaxing rituals for camels in Mongolia. Here are some of our favorite selections.

FADO PORTUGAL


Portugal's capital, Lisbon, is also known as the capital of the musical tradition of fado. Like the tango, the earliest form of fado originated with the city's lower classes. Its tunes and rhythms were derived from local traditions combined with the influence of seafarers and immigrants. Songs are typically performed by a

single soloist, or *fadista*, accompanied by a twelve-string Portuguese *guitarra* and violas. The lyrics of fado, which is the Portuguese word for fate, often tell the story of hardship and evoke a sense of melancholy and yearning.

ROYAL BALLET OF CAMBODIA PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA

Also known as Khmer Classical Dance, Cambodia's thousand-year-old Royal Ballet barely survived under the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge. The female form of the dance is marked by stylized hand gestures and refined, fluid movements. Dancers historically performed during royal ceremonies and observances and were said to be the king's messengers to the gods and ancestors.

TANGO ARGENTINA AND URUGUAY

This traditional dance of the urban lower classes originated in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay — areas shared by diverse populations, including European immigrants and descendants of African slaves and native peoples. Tango began as a blend of the spirited Spanish tango, a type of flamenco, with the fast and sensual Argentine milonga. The form first appeared in dance halls around 1880, and the earliest known published music dates to 1910. 

HARPER EXPERIENCE

Traditional Cambodian Dance with Amansara

Amansara actively supports The Sacred Dancers of Angkor, who undergo the same training as the performers of the Royal Ballet. The troupe is made up of students who were born and raised at Angkor and who are trained at the Conservatoire, which developed as part of an effort to bring clean water and sanitation to area villagers. The dancers pray and meditate before daily training, and the dances reflect the spirituality and unique sacred traditions of Angkor. Performances take place at Amansara twice monthly.